

Muncie police chase nets \$1.3 M in cocaine

By NICK WERNER Muncie Star Press

February 16, 2007

MUNCIE -- Catching Alejandro Duran on Tuesday with 30 pounds of cocaine --worth an estimated \$1.3 million -- in the engine compartment of his pickup truck set a record for Delaware County drug investigators, according to police.

But what's more important is that Duran's arrest disrupted a drug ring that was moving an average of 22 pounds -- or \$1 million worth -- of cocaine into the area on a weekly basis from Fort Wayne, according to Muncie-Delaware County Drug Task Force Sgt. Jess Neal.

"This is something more like you would see in Miami," Neal said Thursday.

On Wednesday and Thursday, Drug Task Force investigators, working with SWAT teams from the Delaware County sheriff's department and Muncie Police Department, raided three houses in Fort Wayne, four in Muncie and two in Indianapolis. The properties were either owned by Duran or occupied by members of his drug network, Neal said.

Those raids netted about another three pounds of cocaine, a pound of marijuana and thousands in cash, Neal said, and resulted in the arrest of a former Muncie man living in Indianapolis.

News of the drug bust was well received by Doug Garrett, who is raising four children between the ages of 7 and 18 at Seventh and Monroe streets, about a block away from one of the houses targeted in the raids.

"This can't be anything but a plus," Garrett said. "The drug element is bad. People do crazy stuff on drugs and you don't want your kids around it."

Police attribute the majority of burglaries and robberies to people feeding drug addictions, often crack cocaine. It is still too early to tell how what type of long-term effect the Duran bust might have on drug-related crimes and the availability of cocaine in Delaware County, Muncie Police Chief Joe Winkle said.

"There are other drug dealers out there that will take his place and that's why we continue to do these investigations," Winkle said.

Word of Duran's arrest, however, might make Fort Wayne drug dealers reluctant to extend their business to Muncie, Winkle said.

The drug task force arrested Duran, 35, of Fort Wayne, just three days after it arrested Christopher M. Bryant, 22, Muncie, on Interstate 69 while he was allegedly in possession of more than seven pounds of cocaine, five pounds of marijuana and \$7,000. Neal said the two arrests were related but did not explain how.

Since December, the drug task force has seized about 45 pounds of cocaine and 30 pounds of marijuana worth more than \$2 million, Neal said, marking one of the most productive three months in the 18-year history of the unit.

Wholesale drug dealers like Duran are difficult to catch because they often only deal with one or two buyers, Neal said. This helps insulate them from low-level drug dealers who are often willing to cooperate with police in return for leniency.

An undercover cop worked his way up the drug chain and found Duran at top in Fort Wayne, Neal said. Duran's arrest set a precedent in the ability of the Muncie-Delaware County Drug Task Force to conduct investigations in multiple counties.

"We're not going to stop in Muncie anymore," Neal said. "We are going to pursue these guys where they are at. Instead of passing information along and hoping somebody does something with it."

Search warrants for the homes in Delaware, Allen and Marion counties were signed by Delaware Circuit Court 3 Judge Robert Barnett Jr., who has the authority to sign warrants for properties throughout the state.

Local police also worked with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, and authorities in Allen and Marion counties.

Duran has served a federal prison sentence for trafficking more than 200 pounds of marijuana, Neal said.

He lives in a 3,000-square-foot ranch house on four acres in Fort Wayne and owns four trucks and a new Harley Davidson, Neal said.

As of Thursday, he was being held without bond in the Delaware County jail on preliminary charges of possession of cocaine with intent to distribute. However, authorities expect that formal charges against Duran will be filed in federal court.

With his criminal history and the amount of drugs involved, Neal said, Duran could face life imprisonment if convicted.

Duran's girlfriend, Alma Rosales, 33, was also arrested Tuesday and was held without bond on a charge of possession of cocaine.

The two were apprehended after a high-speed chase through Madison, Delaware and Grant counties in blizzard conditions on Interstate 69.

Undercover police arranged for Duran to deliver the 30 pounds of cocaine to a person in Delaware County, Neal said. Officers in unmarked cars followed Duran from Fort Wayne and attempted to stop him on Ind. 28 in Madison County, said Delaware County Sheriff George Sheridan, who was involved in the chase.

"At one point he passed eight semis," Sheridan said. "He passed state highway trucks that were plowing." Duran did not stop and turned northbound onto 69.

A motorist reported that Duran threw a handgun from his pickup truck during the chase that struck the motorist's car, Sheridan said.

Duran crashed near the 59-mile marker in Grant County after running over stop sticks.

The cocaine was discovered in the engine compartment, Sheridan said.

Police released few details about the chase Tuesday because the full drug investigation was not completed.